DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 451 561 CS 510 527

AUTHOR Thompson, Kathleen B.
TITLE Debate over a Proposed FedEx Distribution Hub: Examining the Role of Consensus, Power and Norms of Communication Ethics.
PUB DATE 2001-04-00
NOTE 25p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern States Communication Association (71st, Lexington, KY, April 4-8, 2001).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Advocacy; *Citizen Participation; *Community Action; Community Involvement; *Ethics; Higher Education; *Interpersonal Communication; Political Power

ABSTRACT

This paper examines an ongoing community debate over a proposed FedEx distribution hub to be constructed at the local airport. The essay looks to theorists, including Patsy Healey, Richard Johannesen, Daniel Kemmis, James Klumpp, and Martha Nussbaum. These theorists provide a way to view the role of consensus, power, and norms of communication ethics to evaluate the quality of citizens' deliberations. The paper argues that communication patterns in the debate can be improved by more focused attention to the role of consensus, power, and norms of communication ethics. Specifically, it concludes that the deliberative process itself is formative and transformative. Citizens' deliberative practices improve as more people participate. Paying attention to the stories people tell, attending to the effort of listening, recognizing shifting power differentials, and participating in the process are all components of improving the deliberative process. (Contains 18 references.) (Author/RS)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original document.

ED 451 561

Debate over a Proposed FedEx Distribution Hub: Examining the Role of Consensus, Power and Norms of Communication Ethics

By:

Kathleen B. Thompson
2006 Pebble Drive
Greensboro, North Carolina 27410
kbthomps@uncg.edu
Phone (336) 545-5783
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

A top-ten paper presented at the Undergraduate Honors Conference at the Southern States Communication Association in Lexington, Kentucky April 2001.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
K.B. Thompson
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

CS 510 527

Abstract

This paper examines an ongoing community debate over a proposed FedEx distribution hub to be constructed at the local airport. The essay looks to theorists including Patsy Healey, Richard Johannesen, Daniel Kemmis, James Klumpp, and Martha Nussbaum. These theorists provide a way to view the role of consensus, power, and norms of communication ethics to evaluate the quality of citizens' deliberations.

I argue that communication patterns in the debate can be improved by more focused attention to the role of consensus, power, and norms of communication ethics. Specifically, I conclude that the deliberative process itself is formative and transformative. Citizens' deliberative practices improve as more people participate. Paying attention to the stories people tell, attending to the effort of listening, recognizing shifting power differentials, and participating in the process are all components of improving the deliberative process.

Introduction

Almost two years ago the Chamber of Commerce of Greensboro, North Carolina announced with great fanfare that FedEx had been courted and convinced to open a $300 million hub at the local airport. This was advanced as very good news for the local citizens and the economy. Against this initial enthusiasm, community opposition is growing and the dialogue remains contentious.

In this paper I examine the community discourse surrounding the unfolding FedEx debate. I will look at the communication patterns of the debate, which include: the role of consensus, power differentials, and communication ethics issues. I will argue that community debates over the FedEx issue can benefit significantly from explicit attention to issues related to consensus, power, and ethical communication practices.

Several theorists have considered the role of consensus, power, and ethical perspectives to evaluate the quality of community deliberations. With respect to consensus, these theorists give up consensus as the important criterion to judge good deliberation. It is not so much that they are against it; it is more the case that they realize that there are some deep differences that can't be breached. So they concentrate on a good process, on its educative nature—to say that deliberators can be transformed, we grow through the process.

This concept of consensus provides that the process can be good or not; but can it be good without input from the community? The process is teaching how to be citizens, to consider what it means to "live well" together in this community. What are we learning as we go through this process, in terms of moral and citizenship skills? Further, how do we make moral decisions? Being good is the end in itself. All citizens should

come to the table, all should speak and have voice, but is this unrealistic in the unfolding FedEx debate? As I study the communication patterns in this ongoing debate we will find that these concepts are much more difficult to achieve in reality than in theory.

Theoretical Overview

Consensus

James Klumpp (1997) points out that the process of the public sphere reveals values, and no matter what gets decided, the process itself is worthwhile because it scrutinizes and refines values. Klumpp expands on the German philosopher and social critic Jurgen Habermas's idea of a public sphere that resides between the private and the government spheres. This public sphere provides a site for ongoing understanding of community will on the basis of which governmental action could be legitimized. The central idea of community's work moves from knowledge to power. Conversation is an overused metaphor for the quality of exchange in the public sphere, but one idea stressed by the metaphor is that work can be done within the public sphere even without requirement of consensus. In such judgment, notions of public preference and will are developed. Within discussions, values are performed, shaped and critiqued.

John Forester (1999) also values community deliberations, even if those deliberations do not produce consensus. He argues the deliberative practitioner learns from conversation and argument, the actual interpretation and reconstruction of what groups working together say and do. How communities work through their deliberations is what matters. Deliberative practitioners in community planning necessarily work within the politics of place. It is harder to judge the process because it is *ongoing*, part of what is ongoing is the communities development of self identity.

Another theorist, Daniel Kemmis (1990) argues that community communication is a kind of politics of place. To support his claim he compares the US and Montana preamble to Federal and State constitutions. Both are instrumental because he says we seek good and the constitution was formed as an instrument to reach that goal. But, Montana is different: it sees how they felt about Montana was a part of who they were as a people. So it is not just instrumental but who they were was understood in relation to the place they inhabited. So the constitution is literally how people constitute. The hard task is to bring people together as separate, yet pulled together by some common visions of their community. So a state is a political culture that is shaped by place. If we want to strengthen political culture, we need to do so in the context of specific places, looking to how people try to "live well" in those specific places. Each place can contribute to a revitalized civic culture; none is as unique in that ability. But we need to investigate how places shape political culture before asking how this or that place can revitalize political space.

Kemmis (1990) points out that Jefferson wanted to educate citizens for citizenship, so they could see and act upon the common good. Kemmis discusses the republican tradition: people can be educated to deliberate and can rise above self interest to act on the common good in resolving public policy issues. Deliberators need to see the common good, and experience deep engagement with each other and be able to see things from other's perspective. This will not always lead to consensus but will generally sharpen a community's understanding of who it is and what it is to become.

Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson (1996) also de-emphasize consensus. Instead, focus on, among other things, the principle of reciprocity. Reciprocity has its

justification in being mutually acceptable and is motivated by a desire to justify to others. The process that reciprocity takes is deliberation, with the goal itself being deliberation, agreement or disagreement. If citizens publicly appeal to reasons that are shared, or could be shared, by their fellow citizens, and if they take into account these same kinds of reasons presented by similarly motivated citizens, then they are already engaged in a process that by its nature aims at a justifiable resolution of disagreement. They recommend the need to incorporate deliberation as a precondition for adequately resolving political disputes about procedures (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996 p. 25).

Increasingly, these theorists give up the notion of consensus. Instead they focus on the communication process as it reveals how citizens form a moral community and how they uphold their values in standards. As citizens talk and deliberate, they learn about themselves and their community. These theorists conclude that there should be no boundaries in civic participation if communication is to be formative and transformative. As we listen throughout deliberations, we are changed and we can learn and accept others' opinions.

Power

Power is always a factor in community deliberations and citizens cannot ignore important power differentials. Both Forester (1999) and Nancy Fraser (1993) point out that when power is kept in plain view of all communication processes improve. This view differs from Habermas, who suggests that we bracket the power, and set it aside if we want to approximate an ideal speech situation. Habermas outlines four elements of what he terms the "ideal speech situation" for both private and public communication. First, participants must have equal opportunity to initiate and continue communicative

acts. Second, the participants must have equal opportunity to present arguments, explanations, and no significant opinions should go unexamined. Third, people must have equal opportunity to honestly express personal intentions, feelings, and attitudes. Fourth, participants must have equal opportunity to present directive statements that forbid, permit, command, etc (Healey & Hillier, 1996). In an attempt to adapt Habermas's view, I explore how adequately these four elements of the ideal speech situation might serve as ethical standards for communication in this debate.

Fraser (1993) argues against Habermas's ideal and says that his public sphere implies an ideal of unrestricted rational discussion of public matters. The discussion was to be open and accessible to all; private interests were to be inadmissible; inequalities of status were to be bracketed; and people were to deliberate as peers. The result of such discussion would be "public opinion" in the strong sense of a consensus about the common good. Fraser says that according to Habermas, the full utopian potential of the middle class conception of the public sphere was never realized in practice. On the contrary, such bracketing usually works to the advantage of the dominant groups in society and to the disadvantage of subordinates. Fraser's point is, one can't "bracket" power, so attention must be paid to it. Even the language people use as they reason together usually favors one way of seeing things and discourages others. Subordinate groups sometimes cannot find the right voice of words to express their thoughts, and when they do, they discover they are not heard. They are silenced or encouraged to keep their ideas to themselves.

Fraser (1997) recognizes that the Habermasian public sphere excluded many social groups and she points out that these excluded publics have developed their own

discursive arenas. These excluded publics do not merely talk among themselves but seek to affect the larger public, of which they are also members. Effective interaction between these publics requires an improvement in the actual conditions of equality, not merely the bracketing of inequality or power. Fraser argues that there is no call for for putting any strictures on what sorts of topics, interests, and views are admissible in deliberation.

Forester (1999) says there is hardly an ideal form of dialogue, real public deliberation suffers from inequalities of power, and poor information, inadequate representation and histories that silence the voices of many parties. We learn good practices and shortcomings by studying real cases not an ideal.

In this spirit, this analysis begins from a real case, not an ideal, to learn about better and worse community practices. Although we cannot bracket power or ignore it, we do see that when power is recognized, it improves our community deliberations. The theorists encourage us to pay attention to the power issues, because we'll find that power differentials reflect on and shape the deliberative process itself.

Communication Ethics

A third focus of community deliberations include norms of communication ethics, the better and worse ways citizens talk to one another about controversial topics. According to Martha Nussbaum (1996), compassion is intimately related to justice when deliberating community issues. Nussbaum further argues that we should demand political leaders who display the abilities involved in compassion, who show not just mastery of pertinent facts about society and its history, but also the ability to take on in imagination the lives of the various diverse groups whom they propose to lead. In specific community development deliberations, citizens and planners take up broader

understandings of quality of life, measured sometimes by painful personal factors. Forester (1999) terms this approach "not leaving your pain at the door." By this he means that democracy can be painful, and any theory of practical participation that obscures this fact should make us suspicious. To do greater justice to the agonies and possibilities of real deliberative practices, critical social theory must take into account the painful histories that citizens bring to many public deliberations. Forester's ideals that we must explore how practical deliberators might listen to others' claims and understand how they are shaped by institutional and cultural histories. Forester considers relevant emotions in the deliberative practice as well. As we go through the process of deliberation and work we change, and this counts. The goals of the deliberation are that the effective public process *is* a learning process.

Forester supports Nussbaum's view that these narratives provide important insights into the totality of community well being. Daniel Kemmis (1990) adds that deliberating new political issues will be shaped by the community's sense of itself.

Forester (1999) promotes the notion that ethics are to encompass the allocation and recognition of value, so he understands ethics not as standards to follow, but as pragmatic action always done well or poorly, always potentially assessable by standards, consequences and qualities of action (virtues). The deliberative practitioner learns from conversation and argument, the actual interpretation and reconstruction of what parties working together say and do. What works well is what matters. The deliberative practitioner has work to do in the politics of place; it is harder to judge the process because it is ongoing.

In ongoing community deliberation, each debate is one of many public debates within the context of the community. Forester (1999) encourages debaters to develop empathy, do more than just tell a story, and to learn of self in the stories that are told. The narratives in communicative deliberations reveal values and stories reveal what is valued in particular circumstances. The debate itself should have participants striving to learn about self and others and recognize the struggle for identity and learn about what is important. We learn about communities through their stories and stories themselves reveal a value in the hierarchy. Forester says that consensus should not be the goal even if it would satisfy the masses.

Forester (1999) defines deliberation as contingent, choosing among values, it's not a science. There is an ethical engagement, a view of politics as practical wisdom, and we take action. Good decisions are based on the current context and the process leads to good decisions. There are no boundaries in civic participation and the means are formative and transformative. Listening, further, changes as we can learn and accept others' opinions, and be changed ourselves.

Susan Bickford (1996) shows that thinking about listening is central to developing democratic theory and envisioning democratic practices. Bickford states that deciding democratically means deciding, under conditions in which all voices are heard, what course of action makes sense. Bickford stresses that both speaking and listening are central activities of citizenship. Focusing on listening does not require denigrating or diminishing the role of speech, for politics is about the dynamic between the two. She talks of the lust for power and this presents one of the central challenges of politics: addressing a conflict through political interaction demands that we resist the desire for

complete control, but what is behind that desire (a particular commitment) is what prompts us to political interaction in the first place.

Richard Johannesen (1996) points to the tension that potentially exists between "is" and "ought," between the actual and the ideal. What everyone is doing and what we judge they ought to do usually differs. We may feel that ethical ideals are not realistically achievable and thus are of little usefulness. We are reminded by Thomas Nilsen (1974) "we must always expect a gap between ideals and their attainment, between principles and their applications." Nevertheless, he feels that "ideals reflect genuine beliefs, intentions, and aspirations. They reflect what we in our more calm and thoughtful moments think ought to be…our ideals provide an ultimate goal, a sense of direction, a general orientation, by which to guide conduct" (Nilsen, 1974 p. 15). Ethical responsibility is a fundamental dimension of communication competence in the view developed by Stephen Littlejohn and David Jabusch, as cited by Johannesen (1996, p. 165). Their ethical stand applies, they believe, to persuasion in interpersonal, organizational and public communication.

Littlejohn and Jabusch assume that communicators share the responsibility for the outcomes of the transaction and they center their view on the ethical principles of caring and openness. "Caring is concern for the well-being of self and others. It involves a feeling that what happens to others is as important as what happens to self. It is the spirit of good will. Openness is a willingness to share information with others and, conversely, an interest in the disclosures of other people. It is, in short, a spirit of honesty." (Littlejohn & Jabusch 1987, p.12-22).

A fundamental requirement of deliberative democracy is the principle of publicity. The reasons that officials and citizens give to justify political actions, and the information necessary to assess those reasons, should be made public (Gutmann and Thompson, 1996, p. 127). According to Sissela Bok (1989), the test of publicity is a formal constraint on any moral principle worth considering. According to such a constraint, a moral principle must be capable of public articulation and defense. A public statement is a test to weigh the various reasons advanced for disputed choices. It challenges privately held assumptions and hasty calculations.

The temper of our political culture, the condition of our educational institutions, and the character of our representatives are bound to shape the content of democratic deliberation. But the significance of these and the other forces that affect our ways of facing moral disagreement together are likely to be better appreciated the more open our political process is. In this way, publicity provides the necessary means for transcending its own limits.

Patsy Healey summarizes the concept of ethics and demonstrates that Habermas's "public sphere" no longer exists in its original form. Healey (1996) argues rather it has now become a field of competition between conflicting interests where organizations negotiate agreements while largely excluding the public. Although public opinion is supposedly taken into account, it is not in the form of unrestricted public discussion. People can build shared understandings and find ways of dealing with conflicts despite considerable divides if a process develops in which their views and ways of thinking are given value and listened to. It is often the way government works, which forces them into confrontational and oppositional styles of engagement with government.

These theorists concur about the importance of listening, story telling and the ethical and better ways we can deliberate. We are not only shaped by the community's sense of itself, but also how the community communicates what is important to it. The communication standards are reflective of the genuine beliefs and intentions of the deliberators.

Analysis of the FedEx Debate

Consensus

Greensboro's ongoing debate about the proposed FedEx hub construction is in part a struggle to determine what and how it decides how people will "live well" together and what Greensboro thinks of itself. The three components to this paper: power, consensus and communication ethics described earlier by theorists are evidenced in letters to the editor that express various citizens' attempts at deliberation and participation in the process. Their letters are narratives and stories that express their ethics, emotions, and struggles be heard. What Greensboro thinks of itself has a particular influence on this debate. The debate would be different in St. Louis or Detroit; politics of place matters, it influences how a debate unfolds. Greensboro has two forums for this debate to unfold, letters to the editor and community meetings (grassroots and institutional). And, we learn as we go.

In the Greensboro News and Record, November 30, 2000 page A-15, Edward Cone a N&R columnists writes "I started considering the benefits of the project before I started weighing its costs. The more I learn about the costs, the less the benefits seem worth it. This is the language I would like to suggest for whatever public debate goes on over

FedEx: *cost and benefit*. Neither side adds to its credibility by pretending that this is a simple question or that there is a simple answer."

Cone's article addresses the major themes of this paper. Cone says that, "deciding that the project has too many costs is a way of defining the things we hold valuable, and those are the things on which we should focus our attention and investment." Greensboro is trying to find out who they are while examining the politics of place, finding common ground as a community with or without consensus, defining the roles of citizens, power, and communication ethics. The notion of how communities develop a sense of selves, as a community without reaching consensus on special issues is also addressed. Ethics are better and worse, there are ways people talk about values, and there is emotional attachment to the city in listening, these are a few things that are addressed in this paper.

In a special editorial article *CounterPoint*, in the Greensboro News and Record, October 24, 2000 p. A-8, the writer argues against consensus completely and proposes that the FedEx hub be located elsewhere, well aware from the Greensboro area. The author writes "from a business point of view, the chamber of commerce should be looking after the interests of its local businesses who would suffer from the unnecessary ecological and economic devastation to our region." This letter writer does not separate emotion from the opinion and ideas expressed.

Nussbaum argues that in a world of differences, sensitivity to emotion can be a form of moral vision, or moral attentiveness to others (Nussbaum, 1990 p. 54). She proposes that planners who lack emotional range and emotional maturity are likely to miss a good deal of what lies before them, and they are likely to fail as a result of this inattention. These stories engage our emotions and passions, allowing us to learn through whatever

emotional sensitivity we have. These accounts help us to consider "how I might have felt in that situation," or to explore feelings we might not have recognized as relevant.

The general tone of the majority of the letter writers is that consensus seems difficult and likely impossible to obtain. The theorists examined maintain this notion that the goal of community deliberation should not be to achieve consensus, but that the community should learn from the process and this process of learning is what is important. Greensboro is learning from the process, who they are, what they believe in and what they desire. Consensus doesn't appear to be an option. As the deliberators listen to each other's stories, they learn about themselves, their values, their emotional commitments, and they learn of their potential for shifting power.

Power

The second area examined in this community FedEx debate is the role of power. The theorists instruct deliberators to pay attention to power differentials and the community communication reflects this. One grass roots organization called "Boycott FedEx" encourages all opponents to the project to send all of their packages through another carrier such as UPS or the United States Postal Service, especially during the holiday season. Another form of power relationships is expressed in It's Time to Turn Government Action Toward Inner City article of the Greensboro News and Record, August 29, 1999 page H-1. The editor writes, "For the last few years, a debate has been raging in Greensboro: economic growth vs. quality of life. A citizens' group in northwest Guilford County puts "quality of life" in its name to oppose the planned FedEx hub. An anonymous graffiti artist plasters anti-growth messages on construction signs along New Garden Road. Letters to the editor argue on one side or the other, occasionally

accompanied by name-calling. The debate between growth and quality of life says much about who we are and what kind of city we want Greensboro to be. For many, the debate is an either/or proposition: Surely building new factories, offices and homes requires a decrease in green space and an increase in pollution. And it is hard to argue against this view because economic development, urban sprawl and environmental pollution have run parallel courses over the years." This is evidence of not only the opponents arguing against the FedEx hub, but the editor of the newspaper adding powerful commentary as well.

In a meeting with Dr. Andrew Brod, a respected economist on the faculty of UNCG and a frequent contributor to the News and Record, he explains his perception of the FedEx debate. He said the FedEx issue has no legal structure to resolve it. Unlike the referendum on a baseball stadium, which Greensboro rejected two years ago, the FedEx debate must rely on public opinion to influence airport commissioners. Dr. Brod sees the discourse of Greensboro's residents expressing their interests as talking *at* one another. The economist said the opponents have a voice but it is less clear if they have influence or power. "The irony is that it is pointless to have meetings and to say they have voice, because then the opponents are just blown off by those supposedly listening. They are dismissed as pie in the sky opponents."

Dr. Brod continues by saying "The FedEx controversy takes place within a context of a lack of structure at the community level for these discussions—there is no community planning board with force. There is no technical advisor for planning. There is no current planning in place. And, every time the city or county officials and residents formulate a growth plan, it is completely ignored. The rules are deemed unimportant;

they look at growth on a case-by-case basis with no regard for the plans that were to be adopted. It seems quite dishonest and wrong."

Dr. Brod says "there is no structure for change; no mechanism for decision makers, this is pure debate. If the airport authority decides to go ahead then that's the final say, this is federal land. The opponents do not have a lot of influence or power. If they had more support then they would have had more sympathy. When the former major was in office, she had more sympathy for this group. But the new mayor is very pro-business and is not giving this fringe group much, if any, attention. The residents don't have any power in this Federal issue." Another power issue to look at includes the power shift that grass roots organizations have experienced. The opponents have recently hired an attorney to get the city government to assume some oversight authority of these decisions. The statutes of the airport commissioners are interpreted differently and these lawyers are calling for some public statement of accountability by the city government.

Grass roots organizations in Greensboro began with the start of the Underground Railroad, the sit-ins of the sixties and now the growing social movement opposing the plans for FedEx to build a hub in Greensboro. This protest has captured the citizens' attention by introducing evidence that may do harm to the Greensboro area, such as increased air pollution, additional drain on existing water shortage, etc.

As each letter to the editor is published, and each opposing voice is heard, the deliberation process enables the community to exercise its bit of power. Among the power differentials there are also some power shifts. Besides the grass roots shifting power, we also see a shift in power as a result of the recent election.

Communication Ethics

Language patterns reveal some ethical concerns in the debate discourse as well. For example, within the public debate there is discussion about Walt Cockerham's dual role of County Commissioner and status of Board Member on the Airport Authority. The County Commissioner's roles and power come into question. In the November seventh elections the voters rejected his bid for reelection. News and Record, November 9, 2000 page B-1, "Guilford County Commissioner Walt Cockerham lost his seat in Tuesday's election because voters that supported him in 1996 voted against him this year." the president of the main FedEx opposition group, the Piedmont Quality of Life Coalition, said, "Cockerham has turned a deaf ear to us and a whole lot of other opponents to FedEx. At least we have eliminated the charade of him being our 'representative'." So this is a shifting of influence to the ballot box. Cockerham said his defeat Tuesday would only reinforce his efforts to bring FedEx to the county. "My efforts to bring FedEx here will be doubled." News and Record, November 9, 2000 page B-1.

Cockerham was quoted as saying he didn't understand "you people" in the northwest area and "you have it good out there, but all you do is complain." Then he asked them to "be quiet and leave well enough alone." This is evidence of increasingly politicized and polarized participation. According to a citizen in the News and Record letters to editor, Oct. 26, 2000 A-11, "I received the distinct impression that Commissioner Cockerham dismisses citizen questions about the FedEx proposal to the extent that our concerns are even annoying to him. This realization left me feeling disillusioned. I no longer believe that every civic leader is a true public servant. Since the negative effects of a massive nighttime cargo hub would without a doubt be far-reaching and permanent for all of us, shouldn't our concerns be carefully weighted rather

than dismissed?" Bickford (1996) states, "that to ignore public debate is at the peril of their health, their lives, and their freedom" (Bickford 1996, p. 6). We are defined by both our situatedness and our capacity for choice. And politics is not simply about shared interests or shared conceptions of the good; it is how we decide what to do in the face of conflict about all these things. Politics in this sense is constituted neither by consensus nor community, but by the practices through which citizens argue about interests and ends-- in other words, by communication. Listening means "I will put myself in his place, I will try to understand, I will listen for a common purpose or a common good:" The effort of listening in a deliberation is directed toward figuring out what unites us, and we accomplish this through the exercise of empathy (Barber 1984, 175 as quoted in Bickford).

In other words, appeals to the "shared purposes" or "common interests" of a community are not neutral; they often falsely universalize the perspectives of the powerful, while the concerns of those not part of the dominant culture are marked out as particular, partial, or selfish. An orientation toward consensus can thus undermine the very purposes of democratic participation, for the benefits of thinking things through together are lessened when some voices are not heard. And for participants marked out in this way, participation can be deeply alienating rather than empowering. Listening—as part of a conception of adversarial communication—is a crucial political activity that enables us to give democratic shape to our being together in the world.

Forester says, "that with little time and facing the multiple and conflicting goals, interest, and needs of the populace and their more formal clients, deliberators have to set priorities, not only in their work programs but every time they listen to other (Forester,

1999 p. 31). Citizens do the same thing—articulate values through their stories, claims and opposing views. Planners and deliberators cannot get all the facts, so they have to search for the facts they feel matter, the facts they judge to be significant and valuable. So whether they like it or not, they are practical ethicists; their jobs demand that they make ethical judgments—judgments of good and bad, more valued and less valued, more significant and less— continually as they work. Really value-free professional work would be literally what it says: value free, worthless, without worth.

In an open meeting with the Airport Authority opponents were allowed up to three minutes to speak voice their concerns. Two opponents both said the meeting is typical of the response they receive in conversations with the airport authority. They said they are frustrated and feel as if they don't have a voice and they are struggling to be heard. A speaker from the grass roots organization "Boycott FedEx" also said that in these meetings they can and do speak, but their time is limited and participation is low because the meetings are held in the middle of the day while most opponents are at work. In this typical meeting, there were four people who were allowed to speak to the assembled group of Airport Authority personnel. Because planning professionals can create deliberative spaces, they must have the strength to listen to strongly held but conflicting views (Forester 1999, p. 64).

The meeting was a large room with large conference tables arranged in a huge "U" shape. As the 26 authority members sat around the table, the room was lined with the "people on the fringe" the silent protestors holding anti FedEx signs. The first speaker said he only wanted their voices heard. He talked about how civil action has changed our world in the past and passionately spoke of the merits of the Boston Tea

Party. This speaker had four areas of concern, one was that the head of the Airport Authority is also a county commissioner, 2) that no cost-benefit analysis had been done, 3) that this situation was taxation without representation and fourth, he talked about the Airport Authorities' conspiracy of silence and that the FedEx would only profit a few people, not the entire community of Greensboro.

The second speaker said he wanted "a real beginning to communication between the Authority and those who believe FedEx is not an economic boom." He said, "We can see your hesitation to open up the dialogue, it may be confrontational." The speaker goes on to describe his extreme frustration that the Authority is ignoring the FAA's report and is proceeding to spend hundreds of millions of dollars without input from the thousands who oppose it.

This public deliberation of the FedEx issue reveals some language and actions that do not fit the ethical communicative norms that were outlined by the theorists earlier in this essay. Some of the communication standards are evidence of the increasing polarization. There is also evidence that the ongoing debate proves the communication process is both fluid and improving as more citizens participate.

Conclusion

In this ongoing debate with FedEx we see that each debate is one of many public debates within the context of the community and its citizens. According to Forester the very messiness of stories has its own lesson to teach; before problems are solved, they must be constructed (1999, p. 40). Before we can consider options and choices, we must have a decent sense of what is at stake, who and what is involved, and to what we need to pay attention. In this deliberative process we are learning these things.

When comparing theories to the reality of what is happening in Greensboro, I find that the communication process doesn't approximate and is very far from Habermas' ideal speech situation. The current process does not encourage Bickford's active listening, and finally the communicative patterns thus far have not fulfilled communication ethics norms. The Greensboro citizens seem to be telling their stories through their practices of letter writing, attending community meetings where public opposition is discouraged, and through their continued and silenced efforts to stop progress of the FedEx hub.

All hope is not lost however, as the process continues, more citizens are becoming involved on both sides of the debate. This increased involvement can only help the community define itself and bring citizens together. As we talk, we learn about who we are as a moral community and how we uphold our own standards.

Note: The author gratefully acknowledges Dr. Sharon Bracci for her insightful guidance and helpful comments all through the development of this essay.

References:

Bickford, S. (1996). *The dissonance of democracy: Listening, conflict, and citizenship.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Bok, S. (1989). *Lying.* 2nd Ed. New York: Vintage Books.

Brod, A. (1999, August 29). It's time to turn government action towards inner city. *Greensboro News and Record*, p. H-1.

Brod, A. (Sept. 2000). Personal communication.

Carroll, J. (2000, October 24). Chamber lacks credibility on FedEx. *Greensboro News and Record.* p. A-8.

Cone, E. (2000, November 30). Are we really desperate enough for FedEx? *Greensboro News and Record*, p. A-15.

Forester, J. (1999). *The deliberative practitioner: Encouraging participatory planning processes.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Fraser, N. (1993). Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy: In B. Robbins (Ed.)., *The Phantom Public Sphere*, (pp. 1-32) Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Gutmann, A. & Thompson, D. (1996). *Democracy and Disagreement.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Healey, P. & Hillier, J. (1996). Communicative micropolitics: A story of claims and discourses. *International Planning Studies, 1,* p165.

James, M. (2000, October 26). Cockerham is too quick to dismiss FedEx. *Greensboro*

News and Record, p. A-11.

Johannesen, R.L. (1996). *Ethics in human communication*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.

Kemmis, D. (1990). *Community and the politics of place*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

Klumpp, J.F. (1997). On behalf of his time: moving beyond the willardian project on the public sphere. *Argumentation and Advocacy, 33*. p. 147-159.

Littlejohn, S. & Jabusch, D. M. (1987). Communication competence: Model and application. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 10* (Spring 1982): 29-37. Persuasive Transactions Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, pp. 12-22. .

Nilsen, T. R. (1974). *Ethics of speech communication*, 2nd ed. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.

Nussbaum, M. (1996). Compassion: the basic social emotion. *Social Philosophy and Policy. 13*.

Wayne, A. (2000, November 9). FedEx foes shoot down return bid. *Greensboro News and Record*, p. B-1.